

FAQ's

Complete Streets Policy

For a wealth of information about Complete Streets, please visit the [National Complete Street Coalition](#).

Q: Why does Austin need this new policy?

Safety for people of all ages and abilities is a fundamental goal. The Complete Streets Policy is less new policy than a clarification and streamlining of desired outcomes from the City rules, regulations and practices already in place. It provides a coherent overarching policy, as required by City Council resolution No. 20131212-080 and specified in the Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan Action Matrix.

This policy provides a clear vision and set of principles, and clarifies applicability and processes, for related City practices. The City of Austin has made it a priority to provide for the needs of pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users alongside motorists on roadways for many years. This policy provides greater consistency and predictability for that effort. In addition it consolidates numerous goals for our streets – mobility, environmental, and placemaking – into a single policy document. It will benefit Austinites by serving to inform, coordinate and streamline the work and responses of City staff across departments. Once a policy is in place, community members will be consulted on implementation.

Q: I'm concerned about the impact on affordability. Does this policy create expensive new code requirements that every project needs sidewalks, bike lanes, transit, street trees, and so forth?

No. The Complete Streets Policy creates no new regulations. The current requirements in City code still apply. Every street is not being required to add a bike lane, sidewalks, or street trees. As the policy states: "All roadways and routes need not be optimized for all modes."

Expanding peoples' choices of safe, affordable and attractive travel modes has a positive impact on household affordability. By making transit, biking, and walking realistic options, we can help people save on the costs of owning and operating a car, or eliminate a family's need to own two cars.

Q: What about future changes to codes and ordinances?

The policy establishes a review period through Sept. 15, to identify any potential conflicts with existing City codes, ordinances, and manuals. It calls for public outreach and education for community groups, involved professionals, and the development community. Everyone will be invited to comment during the review period.



If any code changes are initiated, that subsequent process will include additional public input and reviews. Any significant code changes likely would be incorporated into the CodeNEXT process already underway.

To ensure that Complete Streets principles are applied with common sense, the policy specifies that complete streets will be designed in a context-sensitive manner.

Q: What does "context-sensitive" mean, in practical terms?

Flexibility! It means that the context – whether the place is Downtown, a city neighborhood, suburban, or rural – and the real needs of the people in that context are considered first. In Downtown, where lots of people are walking and we need a rich transit system, it makes sense to invest in the highest quality pedestrian environment. On a county road in a rural area, we may just need a shoulder that's wide enough for a stranded motorist to walk safely.

On quiet neighborhood streets and in new subdivisions, the best solution may be simply a narrow street design, with a slow speed limit, that "cues" people to drive with caution and watch for people on foot or a bike. But a big, busy road leading into that neighborhood may need a protected bike lane.

The City itself, private developers, and planners and engineers are being asked to thoughtfully design each street to reflect people's real needs in a specific place – rather than simply using standard designs.

Q: Will this policy increase project costs?

The policy states that providing “Safe, comfortable and convenient access and travel for people of all ages and abilities” should be treated as a fundamental goal, *not an add-on*. The investment in superior, safer projects and places returns greater value. The integrated project planning for mobility and stormwater/environmental goals for which the policy calls has been shown to reduce costs. For example, on a current Todd Lane project this approach has saved \$2.7 million and eliminated the need to acquire private property to expand the right of way.

New subdivisions will not be required to have wider streets to make them “complete.” Complete Streets principles encourage *narrower* neighborhood streets-- which can cut development costs to help keep new homes affordable.

Accessible sidewalks already are required for new residential and commercial projects. Projects built under Commercial Design Standards, and other areas of City code, already are required to have Complete Street features. For private projects, no new cost elements are specified. The policy calls for consistent application of City rules already in place. It also specifies training for City development review staff, to create a smoother review process.

Q: Will this policy drive up Austin taxes?

The policy does not create a new tax burden. It does not require that every existing street in the city be retrofitted with sidewalks and bike lanes.

Since 2002, City policy has required that bike lanes and sidewalks be incorporated, where feasible, into City roadway reconstructions. This practice will continue. The City and other agencies can contain project costs, and even reduce them, by integrating complete streets principles at the earliest project phases. As all City transportation projects are approached from a complete streets perspective, the costs will be reflected in projects funded with general obligation bonds. In some cases, a higher quality project of a slightly smaller scope may be recommended, for the same budget.

Overbuilding roads increases the strain on the city's budget and demands more taxpayer dollars to maintain the additional infrastructure in perpetuity. It also takes land out of the tax base, in the form of wide rights of way and larger stormwater management facilities. This policy promotes more efficient use of the road infrastructure already in place.

By building and maintaining complete streets, the City is striving to be more cost effective. Most importantly, this practice reduces injuries and deaths and eliminates the need for subsequent bond-funded programs to make streets safer with retrofits, such as traffic-calming devices or adding missing sidewalks.



Q: How can we have a voice in policy implementation?

To be added to an interest list, please email Samantha.Alexander@austintexas.gov.

You will receive emailed notices of stakeholder meetings to occur in July-August 2014.

